

# Senior Scene



## Team Read Offers Great Volunteer Opportunities

By Jackie Ross Flaum

The Memphis City School second grader's eyes grew large as he flipped through the book pages and pointed at all the pictures. "What does this say? And this?"

Taken aback by his eagerness I said, "Wow, we've got to hurry up and teach you to read!"

The boy looked at me as if that was the first good idea he'd heard lately and said, "Let's go."

Thus began my adventure with a struggling inner city student. I think of him every day. He still can't read on grade level, but he can read 110 more words than when we began.

I was never a teacher – I didn't even help my two daughters with their homework if I could get out of it. Teaching was too much like work for me. Instead I spent 30 years in public relations and writing, which was more like fun and paid the bills.

Years ago a friend asked me to visit her third grade class and help with a writing project. It was only an hour a week so I agreed. It wasn't until I'd been helping for three years that she confessed she'd only meant for me to come once.

By the time we both retired I was a glorified volunteer classroom aide with no aptitude for carpentry, painting, sewing, gardening or cooking. And I was a mediocre bridge player. In short, I had few skills to employ in my golden years.

Clearly I had to find something to do between reading, writing the Great American Novel, and swimming.

I decided to volunteer with what is now Team Read, a one-on-one second grade tutoring program run by Memphis City Schools and pioneered by Caldwell-Guthrie Elementary and Germantown United Methodist Church. With so many students failing I decided I owed it to my community to try -- to say nothing of my own self-preservation. I thought: what if my future heart surgeon or auto mechanic is in school right now as a struggling reader. Yikes!

Team Read trained me – all the good volunteer programs do. I discovered the one-on-one tutoring actually works. It doesn't fix everything wrong in a child's life, but it makes them better readers. Seventy-three percent of the children in the program organized by my church (Germantown United Methodist) made

gains of 200 new words in one school year.

Talk about a sense of accomplishment . . . A sense of purpose . . . A feeling of being needed (rather desperately). And is there anything in the world that beats the light that leaps into a child's eyes when you appear? Not even chocolate tops that.

My struggling reader also taught me a lot while I was showing him flash cards and playing word games. His life isn't like yours, mine, or my daughters'. He saw someone killed by a shotgun blast. He eats free breakfast and lunch at school. His cultural enrichment appears to be cable television. He taught me to be tolerant and less judgmental.

Besides, how could you look at a sweet face like his and say: "You're not worth my time or effort."

Team Read welcomes all comers – even non-teachers like me. Join us by calling program coordinator Barbara Dawson at 416-5732 or [dawsonb@mcsk12.net](mailto:dawsonb@mcsk12.net). Tell her you'd like to donate an hour a week of your free time to creating a future for your children who live in Memphis – they are yours, you know. ####